

Our Search for Meaning – Week Two

Any thoughts from last week?

Free Will: Most people say that they have “free will”. *What do you say?*

But, what does it mean to have “free will”? And, why is “free will” important, especially for this course? The key feature of “free will” is that the future cannot be predicted with certainty, regardless of how much knowledge one has. Neither you nor any other entity can predict *with certainty* what I will do. I make decisions that go beyond all of the accumulated contextual information surrounding me. What I think matters! Absent “free will”, what I'm going to do will be determined, with certainty, by that accumulated information. *From whence comes this “free will”?*

Interesting explanation based on sub-atomic particle uncertainty. As we approach an act, our subconscious mind registers activity about a half second before we might act. We become aware of possible acts one quarter second before an act can happen, and in that quarter second are free to *decide* what to do. That first subconscious spark seems to be a random permutation on possible acts – not predictable with certainty, regardless of prior knowledge. I like it as an explanation. *Does this work for you?*

Modernity: Multiple explanations have been offered. Starting in the Renaissance, the “I” has become more and more important. There have been parallel increases in natural scientific explanation and increases in secularization. And correspondingly, the “we” has become less and less important. I sense radical change since my youth. *Do you see the world as having changed radically?*

There are parallel, disruptive changes in our economy, in our climate and in our social organization. Some have turned to religious fundamentalism. It promises a certainty that many seem to want or need. Many argue for an impending end to modernity, with a future that is as yet unclear. *Are we about to enter the Post-Modern world? What's next?*

Third Age: The very notion of retirement is a recent invention. Mostly, we worked until we could no longer work, and then waited to die. Bismark introduced “retirement” for those 65 and older in 1883. This was a radical move, intended to counter the appeal of the Marxists to the German working man. Today, there are a growing number of us who no longer need to work (for money), and who are still (reasonably) physically and mentally fit. *Do you see yourself as being in this “third age”?*

It's not all sweetness and light. How do we pay for our growing number of third age citizens? *Do third age citizens have an obligation to “pay back”?*

Next Week: How do we explain human motivation? My focus will be on Maslow's needs hierarchy and our existential tensions. And we'll conclude by asking about the importance of transcendence.

See you next week.